

Amendments of the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the above-identified patent application.

Listing of the Claims:

1. (currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television program, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

in the master mode, for a first mode of operation different from the master mode:

receiving, at the viewer input device, a blocking criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in the first mode of operation based on content of the television program, and

receiving, at the viewer input device, an unblocking criterion for unblocking a television program that meets the blocking criterion to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by the user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the unblocking criterion, wherein the unblocking criterion unblocks the television program based on the content of the television program without uniquely identifying the television program; and

in the master mode, for a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode:

allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of one or more programs based on titles of the programs for access by a user in the second mode of operation, and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

2-9. (cancelled)

10. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the password is established by a first-time user.

11. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the password can be changed by a user when in the master mode.

12. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the password can be changed by repeatedly entering an incorrect password for a predetermined number of times and confirming the repeatedly entered password at the end of the entering step.

13. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the master mode of operation remains in effect until a television configured to display the television program is turned off, the user exits the master mode, or a time delay expires.

14. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising the processor denying access to a television configured to display the television program until the password is properly received, after a power outage.

15. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the blocking and unblocking criteria are received in a normal television picture viewing mode via selections from an on-screen menu.

16. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the blocking and unblocking criteria are received at the viewer input device in a guide mode using an on-screen menu activated from a program schedule guide.

17. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the second mode of operation is a babysitting mode.

18. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the steps of receiving the criteria at the viewer input device comprise:

allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of a television program to be accessed in the first mode of operation;

receiving an activation at the viewer input device of a first on-screen button to block the selected program if the selected program is unblocked; and

receiving an activation at the viewer input device of a second on-screen button to unblock the selected program if the selected program is blocked.

19. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the steps of receiving the criteria comprise:

tuning to a television program;

receiving an activation at the viewer input device of a first on-screen button to block the television program if the program is unblocked; and

receiving an activation at the viewer input device of a second on-screen button to unblock the television program if the program is blocked.

20. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of receiving the blocking criterion comprises

receiving, at the viewer input device, a parental control level, the method further comprising:

the processor extracting a parental control rating from a television signal carrying the selected program, comparing the rating with the parental control level, and blocking the selected program if its rating falls below the parental control level.

21. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein one of the criteria is blocking a television program, or unblocking a blocked television channel or television program.

22. (previously presented) The method of claim 21 wherein the blocked or unblocked television channel or program is marked in a parental control review list.

23. (previously presented) The method of claim 22 wherein the steps of receiving the criteria comprise receiving edits, at the viewer input device, of the parental control review list with respect to channel, date, time and length.

24. (previously presented) The method of claim 16 wherein the on-screen menu includes a grid feature for unblocking all television channels whether or not the channels are already unblocked, a sort feature for blocking or unblocking all television programs in a category, and a time feature for unblocking by a time of a day or a day of a week.

25. (previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the processor providing access to a predetermined set of functions specified in a user profile if the password is not received at the viewer input device.

26. (previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the processor restoring the blocking criterion after the user is no longer in the master mode.

27. (currently amended) An apparatus for parental control of a television comprising:

means for inputting a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

means for entering, in the master mode, a blocking criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in a first mode of operation different from the master mode based on content of the television program;

means for entering, in the master mode, an unblocking criterion for unblocking a television program that meets the blocking criterion to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by the user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the unblocking criterion, wherein the unblocking criterion unblocks the television program based on the content of the television program without uniquely identifying the television program;

means for selecting, in the master mode, of one or more programs based on titles of the programs for access by a user in a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode;

means for permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast; and

means for restoring the blocking criterion after the user is no longer in the master mode.

28. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the master mode of operation remains in effect until the television is turned off, the user exits the master mode, or a time delay expires.

29. (cancelled)

30. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 27, further comprising means for entering, in the master mode, a second blocking criterion for blocking television programs from being accessed in at least one of the first or second modes.

31. (currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation, wherein the master mode of operation remains in effect until the television is turned off, the user exits the master mode, or a time delay expires;

in the master mode, for a first mode of operation different from the master mode:

receiving, at the viewer input device, a first blocking criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in the first mode of operation based on content of the television program, and

receiving, at the viewer input device, an unblocking criterion for unblocking a television program that meets the blocking criterion to permit access to the blocked program by the user in the first mode of operation, if the blocked program meets the unblocking criterion, wherein the unblocking criterion unblocks the television program based on

the content of the television program without uniquely identifying the television program; and

in the master mode, for a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode:

allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of one or more programs based on titles of the programs for access by a user in the second mode of operation, and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

32. (previously presented) The method of claim 31, further comprising receiving, at the viewer input device and in the master mode, a second blocking criterion for blocking television programs from being accessed in the first mode of operation.

33. (currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

receiving, at the viewer input device, an unblocking criterion for unblocking a television program that meets the blocking criterion to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by the user if the blocked program meets the unblocking criterion, wherein the unblocking criterion unblocks the television program based on the content of the television program without uniquely identifying the television program;

in the master mode, allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of one or more television programs based on titles of the programs for access by a user in a viewing mode

different from the master mode; and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the viewing mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

34. (currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

storing, in a memory, a first criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in a first mode of operation different from the master mode, based on content of the television program and stored information relating to the television program;

storing, in the memory, a second criterion for unblocking a blocked television program to permit, without providing the password, access to a program that meets the first criterion by a user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the second criterion, wherein the unblocking criterion unblocks the television program based on the content of the television program without uniquely identifying the television program;

receiving, at the viewer input device, a user selection of one or more programs based on titles of the programs for access by a user in a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode; and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

35. (previously presented) The method of claim 34, further comprising storing, in the memory, a third criterion for

blocking television programs from being accessed in the first mode of operation.

36. (currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation, wherein the master mode of operation remains in effect until the television is turned off, a user exits the master mode, or a time delay expires;

storing, in a memory, a first criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in a first mode of operation different from the master mode, based on content of the television program and stored information relating to the television program;

storing, in the memory, a second criterion for unblocking a television program that meets the first criterion to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by a user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the second criterion, wherein the unblocking criterion unblocks the television program based on the content of the television program without uniquely identifying the television program;

receiving, at the viewer input device and in the master mode, a user selection of one or more programs based on titles of the programs for access by a user in a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode; and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

37. (previously presented) The method of claim 36, further comprising storing, in the memory, a third criterion for blocking television programs from being accessed in the first mode of operation.

38. (currently amended) An apparatus for parental control of a television comprising:

means for inputting a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

means for receiving, at the viewer input device, an unblocking criterion for unblocking a television program that meets the blocking criterion to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by the user if the blocked program meets the unblocking criterion, wherein the unblocking criterion unblocks the television program based on the content of the television program without uniquely identifying the television program;

means for selecting, in the master mode, one or more television programs based on titles of the programs for access by a user in a viewing mode different from the master mode; and

means for permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the viewing mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

39. (currently amended) An apparatus for parental control of a television comprising:

means for receiving a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

means for storing a first criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in a first mode of operation different from the master mode, based on content of

the television program and stored information relating to the television program;

means for storing a second criterion for unblocking a blocked television program to permit, without providing the password, access to the program that meets the first criterion by a user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the second criterion, wherein the unblocking criterion unblocks the television program based on the content of the television program without uniquely identifying the television program;

means for receiving, in the master mode, a user selection of one or more programs based on titles of the programs for access by a user in a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode; and

means for permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

40. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 39, further comprising:

means for selecting a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

means for determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

means for prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

means for unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password responsive to the prompt.

41. (previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

the processor determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

the processor prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

the processor unblocking the selected program for access, if the password is received at the viewer input device responsive to the prompt.

42. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 27, further comprising:

means for selecting a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

means for determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

means for prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

means for unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password responsive to the prompt.

43. (previously presented) The method of claim 31, further comprising:

allowing the selection, at a viewer input device, of a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

the processor determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

the processor prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

the processor unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password responsive to the prompt.

44. (previously presented) The method of claim 33, further comprising:

allowing the selection, at a viewer input device, of a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

the processor determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

the processor prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

the processor unblocking the selected program for access, if the password is received at the viewer input device responsive to the prompt.

45. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 38, further comprising:

means for selecting a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

means for determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

means for prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

means for unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password responsive to the prompt.